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**US DEFENSE
AND THE SOUTH ATLANTIC**



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US DEFENSE AND THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

by

Kenneth E. Roberts

8 December 1976

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FOREWORD

This memorandum discusses developments which have created the necessity to reevaluate the strategic importance of the South Atlantic. Soviet policy in Africa and Soviet capabilities in the South Atlantic may threaten long-range NATO and US interests in the area, but the results will have more immediate political than military importance. Several US policy options are considered. The conclusion is that the United States should not seek new, formal military alliances in the region; however, cooperation with Brazil and individual Western European states, in maintaining a credible security presence, should be increased.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the Department of the Army or Department of Defense.

DeWitt C. Smith, Jr.

DeWITT C. SMITH, JR.
Major General, USA
Commandant

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

MR. KENNETH E. ROBERTS joined the Strategic Studies Institute in 1973. Prior to his present position, he was an analyst in the Office of the Chief of Research and Development, Department of the Army. He has a bachelor's degree in international relations from the American University and a master's degree in international affairs from Florida State University. Mr. Roberts has contributed to published compendiums dealing with national security.

US DEFENSE AND THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

Americans seldom think about the South Atlantic.¹ Until recently there was little significant US interest or involvement there. US strategic thinking since World War II has concentrated on perceived Soviet threats in Europe, Southeast Asia, Korea, and the Middle East. Attention was focused briefly on the Congo (now Zaire) in the violent aftermath of its independence in 1960, and on the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, but those were atypical diversions understood by few and quickly forgotten.

At the time of the Congo crisis, Africa was still dominated de facto by pro-US European nations with important political, economic, and even military linkages to their former colonies. Latin America appeared chronically unstable, but not really threatened by any extra-continental power. The world's sea lanes seemed safe and secure, and predictions of Soviet predominance in the Indian Ocean, much less the South Atlantic, seemed far-fetched indeed.

At first glance, Africa and South America may seem to have little in common which would legitimize considering them together in a strategic appraisal. This is partly due to one of the traps of traditional strategic thinking in which analysts persist in defining interests, threats, and policies in certain familiar geographical terms—Latin America,

Africa South of the Sahara, or Western Europe—when sometimes other frameworks could provide useful insights. Africa and South America are both part of that ill-defined complex of lesser-developed, diverse nations commonly known as the Third World. Both are regions of enormous resource potential. Geographically, they are as close to each other as to the United States or Europe. Allied aircraft flew the Atlantic to Liberia during World War II from bases in northeastern Brazil to resupply forces in North Africa and Europe. Parts of northeast Brazil are, in fact, closer to Africa than to many Latin American nations. Increased trade and cultural exchanges are developing across the South Atlantic.

When viewed as a region for strategic analysis, the South Atlantic is one of the most dynamic areas of the world. It is becoming an important arena of great power competition which threatens to disrupt the global balance of power. Soviet influence in the region appears to be growing and Cuba has sent an expeditionary force of more than 12,000 soldiers to Angola. Debates are increasingly heard concerning threats to Western oil routes, new Soviet bases, and support for national liberation movements leading to a reappraisal of detente, a selective return to the Cold War, and even new alliances. The South Atlantic region is extremely important in all these debates.

Several diverse developments have led to the current situation:

- The Independence of African States. Most former African colonies have achieved their independence since the early 1960's. The result has been a continental proliferation of new, largely unstable, autocratic, and sometimes unviable but highly nationalistic states defined primarily by their traditional colonial boundaries. New great and emerging powers and their clients have focused on the continent to compete for influence among them. These competitors include the United States, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the nations of Eastern Europe, Brazil, and Cuba. The Soviets have exploited the continent's instability which is partially based on tribal jealousies and hatreds, competition for power among the new African states, lack of political sophistication, hatred of white-ruled African nations, and economic weaknesses. They and the Cubans have usurped the banner of support for national liberation movements, and have succeeded in widely identifying the United States and the former metropolises with colonialism, aggression, and support for South Africa.

- Potential for Black/White Confrontation in Southern Africa. The

issues of minority-ruled Rhodesia and Namibia remain unresolved, and South Africa's policy of detente with black Africa suffered a serious setback as the result of intervention in Angola. With Mozambique and Angola now independent, many observers predict that white-ruled governments cannot last long. The local power politics of the region, instilled African hatred of these governments, and Soviet/Cuban intervention may frustrate the efforts of moderate leaders to achieve peaceful solutions to southern Africa's problems.

- Expansion of Soviet Interests in Africa and the South Atlantic. Recent Soviet successes in Africa contrast sharply to early defeats in the 1960's. The Soviets have established a strong if not predominant influence in Somalia and Guinea by offering substantial military aid and financial assistance. Loans and weapons have bought good will for the Soviets in such diverse areas as Nigeria, Uganda, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola, Mali, Tanzania, Equatorial Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau. The Soviet Navy now has the capability to operate at all strategic locations on the world's sea lanes. It has been transformed from basically a coastal defense force into a force capable of seriously challenging Western lines of communication in the South Atlantic.

- Reduction of Western Military Strength in the Region. The Cape of Good Hope was traditionally one of the primary lines of communication to the Commonwealth, and Britain's defense interest there was formalized by a South Atlantic Naval Station and the 1955 Simonstown Agreement with the RSA. The British and South African Navies jointly conducted regular antisubmarine and convoy exercises. As the Empire disintegrated and the British economy weakened, however, interest in the area lessened. The British post of Commander in Chief, South Atlantic and South America, was replaced in 1967 by a Commodore's appointment at Cape Town as a liaison officer with the South African Navy.²

Britain had pledged to help build up the South African Navy through the sale of warships and training, but lost the willingness to maintain the formerly close association in the face of international criticism of the RSA. The Simonstown Agreement was not renewed when it expired in 1975 and the British abandoned the concession at Simonstown. The Royal Navy will no longer exercise with the South Africans, and its warships will call at South African ports only on a customer basis when necessary. The decision reflected economic concerns, a shift in British interests to Western Europe, and a revision in British defense policy against containing the Soviet Union in Africa

through military means. It resulted partly from a decision that identification with the RSA did Britain more diplomatic harm than military good. The ending of this 169 year-old naval link means that for the first time NATO nations have no operational base in the South Atlantic.³

The US fleet, hit recently by cutbacks, will find even occasional patrolling of the vast region increasingly difficult with fewer ships. Many World War II ships have been retired, and the US fleet dropped from 976 ships at the height of the Vietnam War to 479 combatant and support ships and submarines in January 1976. This is the smallest US Navy since 1939.⁴ US troop strength in Africa and Latin America was also reduced sharply in 1974 and 1975 as part of US defense retrenchment in the post-Vietnam era.⁵

- Nuclear Potential of the Republic of South Africa, Brazil, and Argentina. The RSA is unlikely to exercise a nuclear weapons option as long as the primary threat is African and guerrilla-oriented. If Soviet military influence expands significantly in Africa, particularly in areas contiguous with the RSA, and the RSA continues to be isolated militarily from the West, Pretoria may seek a nuclear capability as a deterrent to Soviet challenges in a dramatic, desperate effort to preserve white rule. Although neither Brazil nor Argentina has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, there is no indication that a nuclear arms race is developing between them. The possibility remains, however, that a change of governments or a shift in priorities could occur, which would lead to nuclear development programs.

- Growing Power and Importance of Brazil. Brazil's desire for international power and status is being achieved. Within 25 years, it will probably emerge as a major power as important to US security as Japan or any single nation in Western Europe. Growth and major power status will depend on political stability and economic expansion. Both are likely over the next few decades despite serious social and economic problems. As Brazil develops self-confidence, the current obsession with subversion will lessen, political participation will increase, and a more equitable distribution of income and opportunity will be achieved gradually. Persisting internal inequalities will exacerbate tensions, creating some violence and low-level conflict. Most demands for change, however, will be made largely within the established system.

- Transition in Argentina. Argentina's new military government is confronted with enormous problems related to a 335 percent rate of inflation and terrorism from the right and left. Despite a good resource

base, the nation has serious political cleavages which may continue to prevent the application of those resources toward a national purpose. When the current situation is stabilized, however, Argentina will once again exert a significant influence in regional affairs. An Argentina hostile to US interests would be a formidable obstacle to sustaining the US position in Latin America.

- Decline of US Influence in Latin America. Opinion predominates throughout Latin America that the region is ignored and misunderstood by the United States. Argentina has traditionally looked toward Europe for trade, culture, and weapons. The United States and Brazil have had a closer association, but good relations will be increasingly difficult to maintain as Brazil's development and independence increase. Most Latin American nations now have formal, friendly relations with a number of Communist countries.

- Increased Importance of the Sea Routes Around the Cape of Good Hope. More than 25,000 ships transit the Cape of Good Hope annually, making it "the busiest sea lane on earth." These ships carry a large proportion of the petroleum and other strategic materials which travel along the West African coast to both Europe and the United States.⁶ The United States could probably function with disruption of the Cape lines of communication in a wartime scenario. It is doubtful, however, that Western Europe could provide for long a credible defense against the Soviet Union under similar conditions.

NATO nations will be dependent on Middle East oil at least through 1985. Supertankers, present and currently planned pipelines, as well as the Suez Canal, will all be needed to transport the large quantities of oil which will be required by the United States and Europe in the coming decades. The Suez Canal is extremely vulnerable to modern weapons and is too small for today's supertankers. The nationalization and subsequent closings of the Canal in 1956 and 1967 underscore its political vulnerability. Pipelines may save thousands of sea miles in transit but they represent tremendously large investments which must be compensated by high charges. They are even more vulnerable to closure and sabotage than surface transport using the Suez Canal, and frequently multinational approval is required for repairs and maintenance.

- Potential for Increased Importance of the Straits of Magellan and Cape Horn. The United States is currently renegotiating the 1903 Treaty with Panama which governs US jurisdiction in the Canal Zone.

The Canal is extremely vulnerable to attack in a conventional war scenario. An important alternative is the route around the tip of South America, already used by some of the larger ships unable to transit the Panama Canal.

- **Increased Leverage and Importance of Resource-Rich Areas.** The Arab petroleum boycott proved the power of Third World resource-rich nations to influence and intimidate industrialized resource-deficient countries. Nations with little international military or political power now demand and receive the attention and deference of the United States and Western Europe. South Atlantic nations have generally supported supplier causes, but thus far their militance has been muted. Access at reasonable cost to the vast resources of such nations as Brazil, Nigeria, Zaire, Angola, and even South Africa can no longer be taken for granted, however.

INTERESTS IN THE REGION

- **The Soviet Union.** The Soviet Union has few direct interests in the South Atlantic region. Few minerals or other products are imported from the area, although the Soviet Union may face more resource shortages in the future. Soviet interests lie primarily in denying the region's wealth and lines of communication to the United States and Western Europe, particularly during wartime.

The region does provide the Soviets with ports and air bases which could help them equal or surpass the ability of the United States to deploy tactical military power worldwide. Such bases may provide determining leverage in what many observers view as a developing struggle for control of southern Africa. The Soviets would like to gain influence along these frontiers of confrontation so that they can play a determining role when predicted clashes occur.

The USSR would also like to reverse what has been a poor diplomatic record in the region and to reestablish its revolutionary credentials. Angola offered the Soviet Union, together with Cuba, the opportunity to support a strong national liberation movement, access to a 1,000 mile coastline on the South Atlantic with excellent ports, control of the Benguela railroad used to export copper and other products from Zaire and Zambia, as well as a strategic location from which to pressure and threaten Namibia and the RSA with its important Cape routes.

Soviet policy in the South Atlantic may also be seen as a test of US strength and will in an area generally considered peripheral to US interests. The Soviets have claimed that detente cannot be interpreted as freezing the international social-political status quo. The reluctance of the United States to become involved in "national liberation struggles" in the aftermath of Vietnam, and the British decision to phase out its policing role, could make expansion of Soviet/Cuban influence by military involvement much easier and more likely if they refuse to take US warnings seriously. The result could be new challenges in the Middle East or Latin America, as well as Africa.

The nations of southern Africa are also crucial in the ideological battle between the Soviet Union and the PRC. The USSR would like nothing better than to discredit China in Africa, where the two nations usually support opposing factions.

- The Republic of South Africa. The RSA, as a major actor in the South Atlantic, is vitally concerned with the region's security. Soviet power in the region could seriously threaten the RSA since the Soviet Union and Cuba may materially support black terrorist or military actions against Namibia and the RSA, and since the Soviet presence may make US or British defense of the RSA even less likely because of fears of totally alienating the rest of Africa and the Third World and because of the risk of confrontation with the Soviet Union.

The RSA's intervention in Angola frustrated Pretoria's foreign policy goal of establishing "detente" with black Africa, and the independence of Mozambique and Angola could increase the expectations and militance of the RSA's own blacks. The perception of defeat for white South African forces in Angola or elsewhere may have the same result.

The RSA is relatively self-sufficient in resources, and an aggressive program is currently under way to reduce the already limited dependence on imports. Even this resource wealth, however, will not make it easy for South Africa's whites to continue to rule in a region influenced predominantly by the Soviet Union. Thus, for South Africans, a Soviet maritime threat to the Cape sea route is less important in the long run than preventing the establishment of contiguous militant leftist governments.

- Western Europe. Opinions vary in Western Europe over the importance of the South Atlantic to its security interests. Despite the continent's dependence on oil and other strategic materials shipped via the Cape route, many Europeans are still more concerned with the Soviet threat to Central and Southern Europe. British involvement in

the South Atlantic has been steadily reduced, especially after the exit from Simonstown. Most Europeans fear that any NATO link with the RSA would damage their already limited credibility in the Third World. European investment and trade throughout the South Atlantic region are substantial, however.

- Japan. The South Atlantic is important for Japan because of Japan's maritime interests. Many of the tankers rounding the Cape of Good Hope carrying petroleum to Western Europe or the United States are Japanese-owned or built. Japanese interest and investment have increased recently in Zaire and Nigeria, but most ties are still with East Africa and the RSA. Oil and mineral resources, however, make all Atlantic Africa potentially important to Japan.

Brazil is one of Japan's most important future suppliers of resources and markets. Most of that traffic will transit the Panama Canal unless, for some reason, it is closed. In addition, Japan's defense is tied so closely to the United States that anything affecting US security is axiomatically important to Japan. In comparison to other regions of the world, however, the South Atlantic is of relatively low priority for the Japanese.

- Brazil. Brazil's primary international orientation has always faced the Atlantic rather than Latin America. Its population and industry are concentrated along the 4,598 mile Atlantic coastline. They depend upon international trade across the Atlantic to the United States and Europe to achieve the goals of development and great power. Brazil must import between 70 and 80 percent of its oil requirements, largely from the Middle East and Africa, across South Atlantic sea routes.

Brazilians want their nation to be both a responsible leader in the Third World and a recognized international power. Brazil benefits directly from major power concessions to the developing world and uses its influence in the Third World as a justification for being taken seriously as a legitimate, important international actor. This search for power status has led Brazil to seek influence outside Latin America. Africa is viewed as virgin territory and an area with special links to Brazil. The Brazilian Foreign Ministry is well aware of the potential wealth of African resources and the continent's geographical proximity to Brazil. "Racial democracy" in Brazil, the importance of Africa's contribution to Brazilian culture, and a tradition of trade and linguistic ties, particularly with Mozambique and Angola, are all stressed.

Brazil has been concerned primarily with internal threats to security since the 1964 revolution. Although Brazil was quick to recognize the

MPLA in Angola, partly in an effort to regain respect and leverage in Africa after years of supporting Portuguese colonialism, real concern has developed over Soviet and Cuban activities. Influential newspapers in Brazil even have published editorials agreeing with former US Ambassador to the United Nations, Daniel P. Moynihan, that Marxist governments on the Atlantic coast of Africa would be a threat to Brazil.

The Soviet-Cuban presence in Angola gave new relevance to the importance of our eastern frontier. As long as Brazil's eastern frontier was formed by a line of friendly African nations or nations with which we maintain formal relations—such as South Africa—the South Atlantic was outside the limits of the struggle for world power. . . The South Atlantic has become a line of approach for anti-Western military power. The military and diplomatic aspects of Brazilian geopolitics will have to give priority to this new fact. The greatest danger comes from outside, at a vulnerable point—the long extension of our coastline. . . Brazil has a decisive importance on this side of the South Atlantic. We would be dangerously underestimating the more than likely Soviet recognition of our importance if we continue looking inward, especially when the critical area is toward the sea.⁷

As a major indigenous power in the South Atlantic, Brazil has a direct, vital interest in the security of the region. This interest will increase as Brazil's international status increases.

- Argentina. Argentina is too preoccupied with its current domestic situation to be very concerned about South Atlantic problems except for engaging in occasional rhetoric aimed at regaining the Falkland Islands from Britain. The Argentine resource base is strong, however, and this lack of interest may not always prevail. Argentine vessels have conducted maneuvers with the South African Navy and Argentina retains a strong trading tie to Europe. Argentina's interests will, however, in the foreseeable future, be oriented toward a greater hemispheric role among other Latin American Spanish-speaking states.

- The United States. The primary US strategic interest in the South Atlantic is the maintenance of regimes friendly to the United States and thereby denying the region's wealth and location to the Soviet Union. It is a region where either the United States or its NATO Allies have had control for over a century. For the first time that predominance has been effectively challenged. The Angolan affair was viewed by many as a selective return to the Cold War. Without the ability or willingness to respond to Soviet challenges in such areas, the United States may be forced to either accept Soviet hegemony, or challenge detente and issue threats on more globally important issues where the

United States has greater advantage. The United States has a strong interest in avoiding great power rivalry in the South Atlantic.

The increasing concern in the industrialized world over nonrenewable resources makes the resource-rich South Atlantic region important for Western defense. Together, Angola, Zaire, and Zambia, plus South Africa and Rhodesia, compose a region with resources potentially crucial to the world balance of power.⁸ Although the United States is not currently nearly so vulnerable as Western Europe to a denial of these resources, US vulnerability will increase through the 1980's. The interdependence of Western defense makes Europe's weakness also a US liability. Cobalt, chromite, manganese, iron ore, bauxite, copper, and other strategic metals required by NATO come primarily from the Persian Gulf, southern Africa, Australia, and South America. Thus, the sea lanes from the Persian Gulf through the South Atlantic to the United States and Europe have become perhaps the most important in the world. The fear is that in a crisis situation a likely action may be an undeclared war by Soviet submarines against Western shipping around the Cape. It is very important to the United States and Western Europe, therefore, that South Africa not fall under Soviet control.

On the other side of the South Atlantic, the United States is interested in keeping the route around Cape Horn available for shipping in the event that the Panama Canal is closed due to sabotage, an inability to renegotiate the 1903 treaty with Panama, or enemy attack. It is also extremely important that Argentina not be controlled by anti-US, Marxist elements which could threaten shipping and destabilize the hemisphere.

Primarily, however, US interests lie with Brazil. Brazil is the most internationally influential US ally in South America. Since the beginning of the 20th century, economic, political, and military concerns have drawn the United States and Brazil increasingly close together. The United States is still considerably more important in Brazil's policy considerations than Brasilia is to Washington, but this asymmetry will gain greater balance during the next 25-30 years.

The close US-Brazilian relationship is based upon an historical association of mutual respect, confluence of interests, and relative independence. Brazil never suffered the humiliation many Spanish-speaking Latin American republics feel as the result of earlier US "big stick" policies, and the anti-US hostility and resentment openly expressed elsewhere in the hemisphere is much less strident in

Brazil. Brazil's size, location, and abundant human and natural resources give it the potential to be a great power and a valuable US ally. Brazil occupies half of South America and is larger than the continental United States. It is the fifth largest nation in the world, and its 7,000-mile land frontier borders every South American country except Chile and Ecuador. All of Brazil is east of New York City, and it forms the great bulge of Latin America which extends into the Atlantic Ocean. This location makes Brazil strategically important in relation to resource-rich Africa, trans-Atlantic supply in times of crisis, and defense of the South Atlantic.⁹

Brazil is fifth in world production of iron ore, third in manganese production, and has potentially large reserves in tin, nickel, uranium, bauxite, and tungsten. Brazil also has certain rare minerals, such as quartz crystals used in the electronics industry. Vast, geologically unexplored areas still exist in the northern and western regions.

Brazil is one of the most dynamic markets in the world for US heavy industrial exports, and the United States is the largest foreign contributor of private investment in Brazil. Current estimates place US investment between \$3.5 and 4.5 billion. A strong commitment to capitalism, relative political stability, a large internal market, and government incentives and tax breaks create attractive opportunities for investors who possess capital and needed technology.¹⁰

Brazil also enjoys the unique position of bridging the gap between the developed and the less-developed world and has worked hard to legitimize its Third World credentials. The racial polyglot and immigrant characteristics of its population give it interests and special ties to the Far East and Africa, as well as to Western Europe. Although the political system has many faults, Brazil does offer the Third World responsible leadership and an alternate model of development to socialism. Brazil is currently a stabilizing force in Latin America. Growing Brazilian economic and political ties to the rest of Latin America are viewed by some as creating an unhealthy hegemony, but fears of military aggression for aggrandizement are exaggerated. No serious desire to dominate or even lead Latin America currently exists in Brasilia, even though Brazil recently signed an agreement with West Germany for a complete nuclear industry and technology which will create the capability to produce atomic bombs.

THE DELICATE BALANCE

Soviet strategy apparently is to achieve flexibility by positioning

submarines, surface vessels, and aircraft along the Persian Gulf-South Atlantic route to Europe. They recognize through past experience that their status in any one nation is extremely tentative due to local political instability and sensitivities. Implementation apparently began in Somalia 8 years ago when naval bases, radar complexes, and airfields were built.

The US Department of Defense recently reported to Congress that the Soviet Union currently has access to 16 ports and airfields around Africa. Soviet military strength on the continent is currently around 2,900 advisers serving in 11 nations.¹¹

The Soviets have been using the good, existing port facilities in Conakry, Guinea for 3 years and now have proposed to build a naval base on Tamara Island in Guinea.¹² Even more ominous, however, is the possibility of increasing Soviet military influence in Nigeria. The USSR has supplied MIG-17's and MIG-21's to Nigeria along with instructors and maintenance men, and Lagos and other Nigerian ports have been used occasionally by ships of the Soviet South Atlantic squadron.¹³ The Soviet Union has built a dry dock in Equatorial Guinea, a nation visited frequently by Soviet warships. They also have used Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire in the Congo-Brazzaville for military shipments. Angola possesses several good ports such as Lobito and Luanda which the Soviet Navy would like to develop further. Baia dos Tigres, in particular, has a superb deep water anchorage. Henrique de Carvalho and 11 other advanced airstrips built by the Portuguese in Angola could serve Soviet strategic designs well.¹⁴

The Soviet Navy is poorly equipped for sustained operations against US combat ships. One of the primary vulnerabilities of the Soviet Navy is logistics. Recent Soviet actions in Angola and elsewhere, however, have demonstrated improved airlift and sealift capabilities which permit greater exertion of influence on a global scale. Most Soviet weapons were shipped commercially to Angola, but were protected by a naval squadron from the Baltic sea fleet based at Conakry. The Soviets offered Cuba new IL-6 troop carriers to transport forces to Africa, and they have used the high altitude TU-95 over the South Atlantic to monitor US troop movements.¹⁵

The Soviet Navy, it may be argued, has an important offensive mission since the Soviet Union has no overseas territories or defensive installations to protect and supply by water comparable to Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Canal Zone; the Soviet Union does not depend on overseas imports, and therefore cannot be seriously

threatened by a naval blockade, and since the Soviet Union is relatively invulnerable to a maritime invasion. The Soviets currently lack only two strategic materials—tin and rubber, and import only fish and agricultural grains.¹⁶ Still, one must remember that during World War II the four primary sea routes to the USSR were in enemy hands, thereby almost totally isolating the Soviets. Japan prevented shipment via Siberia and the Germans controlled the Baltic and the Black Seas. The Arctic route to Murmansk was vulnerable to German-held Norway. A new but long route had to be created via the Cape of Good Hope, Iran, and the Persian Gulf. Soviet strategic planners obviously take historical lessons into account.¹⁷

Still, Russia is much stronger and more self-sufficient today. The Soviet Union and its allies are less dependent on the seas than is the West. In spite of this fact, the Soviet Union has been expanding its Navy and increasing its naval presence around the world as a means to strengthen Soviet political influence. The Soviet Navy has, in the process, probably expanded beyond the legitimate needs for military defense of the USSR.¹⁸

In assessing the military importance of recent and potential Soviet expansion in the South Atlantic, several important facts must be considered:

- Soviet warships already cruise relatively easily throughout the South Atlantic.
- Denial of petroleum to the United States or Western Europe would probably occur either at or closer to the source, or closer to the Western European ports.
- Any Soviet action to interfere with Western shipping would be an act of war which could lead to a nuclear exchange. The Soviets are unlikely to take this risk lightly.
- The USSR has sought land bases because of the lack of air flexibility and a large carrier force. They represent the acquisition of new Soviet capabilities which the United States already had.
- Naval bases are probably no longer absolutely essential to assure control of sea lanes. Soviet bases in Africa are therefore really more of a convenience than a new military threat. Submarines can be supplied more efficiently from a good fixed base with necessary equipment and facilities than from distant home ports or submarine tenders. In wartime, however, both US and Soviet submarines could operate at sea for long periods.
- Western shipping throughout the world would be vulnerable with

or without Soviet bases in Africa, but the vulnerability would obviously be greater with such bases.

- Soviet facilities are generally not granted by treaty and thus access to them would not be assured in wartime.

- Soviet bases in Africa would be extremely vulnerable in a wartime scenario. The bases themselves must be largely supplied by sea rather than by overland routes. Although interceptor aircraft and surface to air missiles would offer some protection, their survivability is doubtful.

- During periods of crisis, Soviet bases limit US flexibility because they raise the risks of confrontation.

In the political realm, however, the impact of increased Soviet presence is more of a real and immediate problem. It is not likely that any African nation will completely give up recently achieved independence to the Soviet Union, although they will use the Soviets, and the United States as well, whenever it is to their advantage. The Soviets have been notably unsuccessful at buying long-lasting friendships from African nations. Total subservience is unnecessary, however, to reduce US credibility and influence in the Third World, and to create serious dilemmas for US policymakers. Soviet actions in Africa which evoke reactions by South Africa, for instance, have the result of encouraging the United States to take positions which imply the defense of Pretoria, making the Soviet Union the obvious champion of the black African cause. US inaction, however, may tempt the Soviet Union to expand a drive for hegemony into new areas.

US OPTIONS

The dilemma for US policymakers in the South Atlantic is how to best limit Soviet influence, protect genuine US interests, and avoid a world policeman's role. These goals must be pursued at a cost and scale acceptable to domestic public opinion and to US Allies in the region and elsewhere. There are several possible alternatives for a US regional defense strategy. Viable US options are limited, but not mutually exclusive.

- Seek Greater Involvement by Western European Nations in the South Atlantic, or Expansion of NATO to Include South Atlantic Responsibilities or Members. The reluctance of NATO nations to consider areas south of the Tropic of Cancer as important to the Alliance may become dangerous if the Soviet fleet expands into the vacuum of the South Atlantic. As one author recently argued,

It is true that in respect of its land environment the provision of the North Atlantic Treaty specifies that an attack, namely a territorial violation, on one member of the Alliance constitutes an attack on all, but in respect of the high seas the territorial limitations are not so strictly defined. Therefore, the fact that Western solidarity is formally limited to the North Atlantic area need not mean that NATO naval forces cannot take over control and protection missions in other ocean areas as well.¹⁹

In the author's opinion, NATO, and NATO nations individually, are unlikely to be willing to expand their role in the South Atlantic, despite the large share of European trade which travels through the region and reports of belated European involvement in the Angolan affair. Most European members will reject expansion of the Alliance or their individual defense responsibilities outside the context of the Alliance. NATO has survived as long as it has because of a close identification of interests and a generally perceived threat from Central Europe. European nations are also sensitive to charges of neocolonialism. The Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway particularly will oppose even an implied association with the RSA.

The South Africans would obviously like to join NATO. Such an association, Pretoria feels, would recognize the true importance of the Cape route, demonstrate the acceptability of the RSA as a dependable Western ally, and it would help strengthen South African pretensions to intermediate power status. It would also, the critics argue, commit the members to defend the present South African government in the eventuality of armed conflict. If the Soviet Union and Cuba are able to encourage military action against the RSA through client states in Africa, it will be very difficult to distinguish between an African struggle and extracontinental aggression.

Both Simonstown and Silvermine have been offered to any Western nation willing to use them. Silvermine is said to be an ultra-modern, bomb-proof, fully computerized maritime communications and operations center equipped to monitor 25 million square miles of ocean from Venezuela to India.²⁰ South Africa would like to use these bases to achieve closer cooperation with NATO nations. The South Africans have even gone so far as to take out full page ads in large Western newspapers offering these valuable defense facilities to NATO navies, asking "can a small fishing village in South Africa provide a major link in the defense of the West," and "could an organization like NATO have a base in Simonstown, South Africa?"²¹

If political considerations were not a factor, the US Navy would certainly savor the opportunity to base a fleet on the Cape. US interests in these facilities have surely increased since the Soviets and Cubans began their offensive in Angola. More analysts are suggesting it is in the mutual interest of both South Africa and the United States to develop closer political and military relations. Currently, US warships are forbidden to call at RSA ports except for emergencies. A tie-in between the Silvermine facility and the US intelligence system would obviously provide the West with valuable capabilities, however. The Soviets are already supposing sharing of intelligence, and have charged " 'secret cooperation' between South Africa and the military organization of NATO is so advanced that a real, if not legal, military union now exists."²² Many Africans probably suspect such covert cooperation also.

The United States and other NATO members must balance military desires with political feasibility. Military cooperation, much less formal alliance, with the RSA would mean alienating most of Africa to the Soviets' benefit, disregarding the views of the United Nations, and accepting domestic criticism for supporting the RSA's racist policies. Other practical regional interests must also be considered, such as the fact that Nigeria is currently a large supplier of imported oil to the United States.

Western Europeans, who have thus far tried to deny important interests in the South Atlantic, may eventually be forced to admit that they perhaps have stronger economic and strategic interests there than does the United States. Detente has already suffered, and Soviet actions may stimulate NATO even if its members are unwilling to accept any defense responsibility in the South Atlantic.

• Establish a South Atlantic Treaty Organization. The importance of the South Atlantic to non-NATO intermediate powers has led to proposals for some sort of South Atlantic Treaty Organization. For any such defense organization to be viable, it must have the membership or at least the support of the United States. Others usually included in discussions of such an arrangement are the RSA, Britain, Brazil, Argentina, and sometimes Australia. Australia has a strong interest in the region because of the importance of its trade with Europe. Zaire and Nigeria might be potential members. The RSA would seem to have the most to gain by such an alliance, and has been perhaps its strongest supporter. The idea is one which has sparked the imaginations of Brazilians also, especially naval strategists, for a number of years.²³

The likelihood of establishing even a loosely associated South Atlantic Treaty Organization is not good, however. The Argentine and the South African Navies conducted joint exercises in the South Atlantic in 1969, but Argentina's current domestic problems are unlikely to permit such arrangements in the near future.²⁴ Until Britain and Argentina settle their dispute over the Falkland Islands, Argentina is unlikely to establish any new ties with the British. The British, on the other hand, are not likely to reverse their military withdrawal from the region.

Brazilian-Argentine relations are currently strained over Brazil's joint project with Paraguay to construct a gigantic power facility on the Parana River at Itaipu. The Argentines fear Brazil's growing power status, and especially the growing predominance of Brazilian influence in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. There are other mutually controversial issues related to trade discrimination, rival diplomacy, potential exploitation of Antarctica, fishing rights, and nuclear developments. Despite these differences and suspicions, however, Brazil and Argentina have exercised restraint toward each other. The future of Argentine-Brazilian cooperation depends primarily on the future character of Argentina, which is difficult if not impossible to predict at this time. Historical jealousy and pride will make any formal alliance unlikely, however, unless a Soviet threat emerges more clearly to the land areas of the southern cone of South America.

Another major obstacle to any formalized regional alliance is again the domestic policies of South Africa. The concept of apartheid, whether based on myth or reality, remains repugnant to the rest of the world even though the South Africans have liberalized their laws in recent years. New formal US military commitments are also unlikely to gain congressional approval because of fears of overcommitment, a questioning of traditional alliance systems, an unwillingness to be too closely identified with South Africa, and the existence of the Rio Pact.

Thus, although militarily and geopolitically attractive, a South Atlantic alliance is an idea whose time has not yet come. It is not a viable option for US security within the next 5 to 10 years, at least.

• Unilateral US Defense of the South Atlantic by Expansion or Redeployment of Current Resources. Another US option involves a policy of policing the region alone. This option discourages reliance on unstable, undependable, or weak allies. Large aid packages in payment for base rights and sensitive political issues would be largely avoided. Unilateral defense may be an unrealistic strategy, however, in terms of

US resources and domestic political considerations in an era when the Navy has been shrinking and defense spending has been decreased. Nevertheless, a plan of more flexible deployment for US aircraft carriers and other vessels could increase their political effectiveness in times of crisis and would provide evidence of US strength and intentions. Increased exercises to "show the flag" in the South Atlantic are possible, despite Navy cutbacks.²⁵

- **Avoid Involvement.** Some analysts argue that the United States has few real interests in the South Atlantic and should not become involved at all. This argument leads to a dangerous gamble that the Soviet Union may move in the region but will usually fail. The consequences of losing too many such gambles are too serious for a great power to accept. Few regions have no importance to a great power, even if that interest is denial of a region's resources or lines of communications to a major rival. The Western Alliance certainly has a strong interest in the South Atlantic. Statements to the contrary are only self-deluding, particularly if the Soviets feel it is as important to the West as their actions indicate.

- **Back the Winners.** The argument is made that the United States needs to develop a foreign policy more independent of the Soviet Union—a policy which is more flexible and less reactive. According to this argument, US policy should be based more on pragmatic than ideological concerns. The argument maintains that US interests should not be viewed as a zero-sum game with the Soviet Union. Writing about Angola, Joseph C. Harsh commented,

At no time, so far as the printed record shows, did anyone in Washington concerned with Angola give serious thought to a policy of "backing the probable winner" regardless of what the Soviet Union might do . . .

For purely ideological reasons the United States backed the ultimate losers in China, Cuba, and Vietnam. And now Washington finds itself doing business with the winning communist regime in China and moving uncomfortably toward doing the same with both Cuba and Vietnam . . .

Backing the "anticommunists" is all very well when the anticommunists happen to be stronger, to be in tune with nationalistic inclinations, and to be the probable winners. But to back them solely for their anticommunism has proved to be a waste of effort and time. Every time Washington has done it, Moscow has been the gainer.²⁶

There is much to recommend consideration of this policy on a case by case basis, but it cannot serve as a broad strategy to protect US interests

in an important region. US arms aid may be required to deter Soviet/Cuban activities and to preserve US credibility in certain cases when success cannot be absolutely assured.

- **Pressure the Soviet Union/Cuba Outside the South Atlantic.** Actions such as a naval blockade or invasion of Cuba, or retaliation against the Soviet Union at the MBFR negotiations or on trade issues, are among the options which the United States might conceivably pursue outside the South Atlantic region to deter further Cuban or Soviet activity there. A Cuban naval blockade today would be much more difficult than in October 1962. Soviet naval strength has greatly increased and the Soviet ability to deploy forces worldwide is much greater. A blockade or invasion would risk a world war. Nonmilitary pressures against the Soviets would probably not alter their strategy. These tactics might be necessary in a crisis situation, but they are serious, negative actions which indicate failure rather than success for US regional policy in the South Atlantic.

- **Seek to Establish Stronger Bilateral Ties with Regional States.** Potentially powerful nations such as Nigeria and Zaire may develop strong regional interests in the South Atlantic, and US military influence should be sought there, but their concerns and capabilities at present are local. Argentina is still too unstable, and South Africa is too controversial, leaving Brazil as the most logical regional partner with whom to establish a close association in defense of the South Atlantic. A recent editorial in Rio de Janeiro's *Jornal do Brasil* stated that as a result of Soviet and Cuban moves in Africa, "it is a geographic imperative that Brazil become a naval power in the South Atlantic."²⁷ Pragmatic concerns often lead Brazil to take independent and Third World positions on primarily economic issues, but insofar as any new Cold War division of political alignments is valid, Brazil's allegiance lies firmly in the West.

Brazil is a member of the Rio Pact, along with the United States. The US and Brazilian militaries have already developed close, cooperative relationships based partly on joint combat experience in World War II. The combined peacekeeping activities under the Rio Pact in the Dominican Republic were under the command of a Brazilian officer. Brazilian officers regularly attend US command and staff colleges and visit major military and industrial centers in the United States each year; and Brazilian military doctrine and organization are influenced strongly by US practices. The Joint Brazil-US Military Commission (JBUSMC) has functioned actively as an agency for

military collaboration since World War II. The Joint Brazil-United States Defense Commission in Washington is a counterpart group to the JBUSMC and is composed of US Joint Chiefs of Staff representatives and the three Brazilian military attaches. Illustrative of the importance of this military association to US-Brazilian relations is the fact that President Geisel was a member of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force which fought with the US Fifth Army in Italy. He attended the US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and was a Brazilian military attache in Washington and a member of the Joint Brazil-United States Defense Commission.

Brazil has made a remarkable fiscal recovery since the 1964 revolution, despite temporary setbacks due to oil imports, by stressing state capitalism and innovative economic planning. Much of the progress achieved thus far has been at the expense of social reform and individual political rights, however. The return to democracy has been indefinitely delayed in Brazil because government officials feel that it would lead to the resurgence of subversive activities. Although most Brazilians are relatively nonpolitical, partly by choice and partly by circumstance, demands for greater civilian participation in the political process will increase as Brazil becomes more prosperous and economically developed.

The next few years will be critical in determining the future of US-Brazilian relations and cooperation in defense. Human rights violations, nuclear development, and trade discrimination may make future defense cooperation controversial in both capitals. Yet, the long range convergence of interests demands close association. The United States has the great opportunity with Brazil to build upon a positive, dynamic relationship to retain the support and good will of an important ally who will be an important world power tomorrow.

The Sao Paulo industrial complex, with government support, can achieve the capability of producing even the most sophisticated arms. The aircraft, steel, and shipbuilding industries are currently underdeveloped but growing, as is Brazil's capacity in computer and electronics technology. Brazil's Air Force, equipped with Mirages and F-5's, is by far the strongest in Latin America. The Army, with a large manpower mobilization potential, is relatively well equipped. A new parachute brigade, composed of 7,000 men transported with their equipment in 48 Hercules C-130's, will give the Brazilian Army the air means to operate anywhere in South America within 12 hours.²⁸

The Navy is currently undergoing a 10-year modernization program.

Priority is being given to port infrastructure development, the establishment of a large merchant marine, and the development of a sophisticated ship-building industry. The Brazilian Navy is the best trained and equipped in Latin America, but it is defensive in nature and currently incapable of much power projection. There is a growing desire, however, to build a navy with a greater ability to show the flag, participate in the defense of the South Atlantic, and convince the world that Brazil is a great power. Some Brazilians even claim that at least a two-ocean navy concept must be adopted before such recognition can be achieved. In the longer range, therefore, Brazil can be expected to devote more resources to its maritime development.

The United States should take steps to improve Brazil's military, particularly naval capabilities, for meaningful coordinated action in the South Atlantic. These steps include joint exercises, planning, and standardization. No new formal military alliances are recommended, but a closer defense association will benefit both nations and their interests in the South Atlantic. Such cooperation, which would be largely naval, should not genuinely alarm other Latin American nations. Brazil currently is not seriously threatened by events in Africa or current Soviet naval strength in the South Atlantic, but these events do impact on Brazil's future security and its desire for and achievement of major power status. US-Brazilian military cooperation should be only one aspect of a much broader bilateral partnership. It could become very important, however, if Soviet activities in the region increase.

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC: A REAPPRAISAL

The South Atlantic is no longer a route to nowhere or a region where the United States has no interests. Soviet policy in Africa and capabilities in the South Atlantic may threaten long-range US, Western European, and Brazilian interests. The immediate impact will have more political than military importance. US options are restricted but not mutually exclusive. US strategy must be restrained but flexible, it must be based on a willingness and ability to meet Soviet challenges where necessary and to conduct policy independent of Soviet actions whenever possible. Movements and politicians must not be given US support simply because they are anti-Communist when they are locally unpopular or corrupt. It must be recognized that few if any newly independent nations will easily give up their sovereignty, although they will use to their advantage both the Soviet Union and the United States

in whatever ways possible. The United States must strive to keep the region out of the arena of great power politics whenever possible, but a greater US naval presence in the South Atlantic and even some increased arms aid to African nations may become necessary.

Good relations should be maintained with the South Africans, but the United States must not be viewed as the RSA's protector. Yet, a South Africa under the control of any power hostile to the United States would be a potentially serious threat to US interests. This dilemma might be avoided by maintaining the capability to respond militarily, by urging South African liberalization, and by encouraging a renewal of detente between South Africa and black Africa. In the end, however, what has been regarded as primarily a racial issue may prove to be as much a case of traditional power politics fueled by some myths, some truths, and many irrationalities which the Soviets and others have used to great advantage.

The United States should not seek additional formal military alliances in the region, but cooperation with Brazil should be increased. The United States should also seek to convince its Western European allies that the South Atlantic is important to their security.

The region is not always a zero-sum game in which all Soviet gains are US losses, and sometimes no US reaction or presence at all is desirable. Danger signals imply, however, that the Soviets are playing to win in the region, even though the Angola gain will be difficult to duplicate. Until facts prove otherwise, therefore, the United States, Western Europe, and Brazil must plan and develop the capabilities necessary to oppose a Soviet hegemony in the South Atlantic.

ENDNOTES

1. For the purpose of this paper, the South Atlantic is defined as primarily that region of the Atlantic Ocean which is south of the Tropic of Cancer where the responsibilities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization end. Major emphasis is placed on the part of that area south of the Equator. The region is bounded by the eastern coast of South America and the western coast of Africa. It contains two of the world's most strategic areas, the Cape of Good Hope, around the southern tip of Africa, and Cape Horn, around the tip of South America. In terms of US national interests, the most important regional entities are Brazil, Argentina, Nigeria, Zaire, Angola, and the Republic of South Africa. This analysis excludes consideration of the insular Caribbean, which is in itself a unique region for US interests and involvement because of its geographical proximity to the US mainland and its historical relationship to the United States.
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5. "Fewer American Servicemen on Guard Around the World," *US News and World Report*, December 29, 1975, p. 21 and, "Fewer US Servicemen Abroad: Where They Are, Christmas '74," *US News and World Report*, December 30, 1974, p. 25.
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7. "An Atlantic Brazil," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 18, 1976, p. Y, quoted in "Jornal Comments on Role in South Atlantic," *FBIS, Daily Report, Latin America*, January 21, 1976, pp. D2-D3.
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13. *Ibid.*
14. Drew Middleton, "Soviets Said to Aim for Angola Bases," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1975, p. 5.
15. Robert Evans and Robert Novak, "The Cuban-Russian Threat to World Power," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 1976, p. 15. The naval squadron consisted of a Kresta II cruiser, a Katlin missile-armed destroyer, a landing craft and a fleet oiler. Drew Middleton, "Soviet Improves Arms Transport," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1976, p. 5.
16. D. F. Spencer, "What Russia Is Up To," *National Review*, May 9, 1975, p. 500.
17. Vice Admiral Malcom W. Cagle, USN, "The Keys That Lock the Oceans,

the Narrow Seas, the Straits and Canals," *Vital Speeches*, August 15, 1974, pp. 648-650.

18. Michael T. Klare, "Superpower Rivalry at Sea," *Foreign Policy*, Winter, 1974-75, pp. 86-96, 161-167.

19. Wolfgang Hopker, "Soviet Global Strategy—A Challenge at Sea," *NATO Review*, June 1974, pp. 16-17.

20. Hessman, p. 29.

21. One such ad appeared in *The New York Times*, April 17, 1975, p. 14.

22. "Soviet Indicates Rebuff to US by Continuing Aid to Angolans," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1975, p. 12.

23. F. E. C. Gregory, pp. 4-7.

24. Fontaine, *Brazil and the United States*, pp. 41-42.

25. Barry M. Bleckman and Robert G. Weinland, "The Backwaters of Security Policy," *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1976, p. A15.

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28. "Fortress America," *Latin America* (London), March 7, 1975, p. 79.

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